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AUTHOR Webster, David S.
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ABSTRACT

Three commonly used methodologies for ranking undergraduate and graduate colleges and programs are compared and evaluated. The first is that of Jack Gourman. It uses a scoring system similar to that of the College Board Examinations with scores from 200 to 800, assigned in two areas: one for the strength of academic departments, and one for important nondepartmental features of the institution. The second, devised by Beverley Hurlbert, has been used only in anthropology. It uses exchange theory, wherein the relative status of people or groups is measured by their patterns of personal interaction. The third methodology uses the ratings of experts, collated to produce a single final rating. These are called the (Allan) Cartter and Roose-Andersen studies. Each methodology is explained and criticized. It is concluded that the best way to evaluate and rank academic departments would be to create a rating system that is at the same time more objective and more subjective than existing methods. Objective ratings would include those of faculty degrees, honors, and publications; student quality as measured by undergraduate school and grades; proportion of students that are enrolled full-time; faculty-student contact hours; student job placement; library resources and accessibility; and others. Subjective measurements would include number and quality of student interactions; student reading habits in the field of study; field-related campus resources outside the department; and stimulation of the departmental ambiance. A bibliography is included. (MSE)

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A BRIEF HISTORY AND CRITIQUE OF PUBLISHED RATINGS OF GRADUATE SCHOOL DEPARTMENTS

An unpublished paper. UCLA Graduate School of Education, 1977.

DAvid S. Webster
Chancellor's Intern Fellow
UCLA

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INTRODUCTION

Though the first college in America was founded well over 300 years ago (Harvard, in 1636) and there have long been a large number of colleges here (in 1870 there were 563, in 1900 977 and in 1920 1,040 (15) the art and science of comparing those colleges in terms of excellence is still -- to put it very mildly -- in its infancy. Starting in 1924 when Raymond Hughes, then President of Miami University in Ohio, prepared a rating of the leading graduate departments in the United States, the major ranking studies have used one of three types of "methodologies."

Jack Gourman's Methodology

One is the wildly eccentric method used by Jack Gourman, in his Gourman Report: Ratings of American Colleges (4). In this study, the only one ever done which purports to assess the relative merits of undergraduate colleges, he gives 1187 colleges a "Gourman Rating" on a scale identical to that used in College Board examinations, with 200 being the lowest possible score and 800 the highest. He gives each college two ratings, one for the strength of its academic departments -- history, philosophy, economics and so on -- and another for what he considers important non-departmental features of a college, and then averages them for a composite rating. The bizarre features of this study are almost endless and include

the following:

1. Gourman's strange ideas about education. He writes, for example, without offering any evidence, that "It has been long established that a minimum of ten years after college graduation is necessary to produce an excellent teacher in the classroom." (p. xiii) as a rationale for rating "older" college faculties better than "younger" ones.

2. His odd custom of equating in importance aspects of a college that are enormously different in their contributions to the excellence of the college -- for example, he counts the excellence of a college's "alumni associations" equally with that of its library, and the strength of its "public relations department" equally to that of its "faculty effectiveness."

3. His tendency to give exactly the same mark for a given feature to almost every college in his study -- for example, of the first 115 colleges he rates, from Abilene Christian to Bradley, he gives a "D" rating to the Board of Trustees at 113 of them; only the Boards of Amherst and Antioch partially escape Gourman's wrath, being graced with him by "C"'s.

4. Another idiosyncracy of Gourman's is his habit of vastly overrating the excellence of large universities compared to small colleges. Almost any prairie A & M school, if it enrolls more than 15,000 students, receives a rating superior to all but the very finest of America's liberal arts colleges. Keeping in mind that he is rating the excellence of each institution for <u>undergraduate</u> study, not its research excellence,

it is remarkable that he gives Swarthmore a 623 and the U. of Minnesota a 645; Wellesley a 524 and the U. of Washington a 614; Vassar a 458 and the U. of Iowa a 535.

5. A final interesting sidelight of his report is his unbounded admiration for Notre Dame, to which he assigns a score of 741, considerably higher than UC Berkeley's 693, CAltech's 697, MIT's 664 or the U. of Wisconsin's 656.

Exchange Theory Methodology

Another type of study, devised by anthropologist Beverley Hulbert (6), has been used in only one rating which covers only one discipline -- anthropology -- but it is of interest for its distinctive methodology. Using "exchange" theory, whereby the relative status of people or groups is measured by their patterns of exchange, she analyzes the job placements of 1358 recent anthropology Ph.D.'s from 80 departments. When departments hire each other's Ph.D.'s she concludes that these departments are equal in status; when, say, the University of Florida hires Harvard's Ph.D.'s but Harvard does not reciprocate, she concludes that Harvard is higher in status. By calculating which anthropology departments hire (and fail to hire) from which other departments, she calculates the relative standing of each department. But her methodology has a number of weaknesses, as follows:

1. Even conceding the validity of exchange theory for determining departmental rankings, she can only measure the

strength of departments relative to each other -- she cannot determine the absolute excellence of each department. For example, it is highly likely that there are more first-rate departments of English and history in the United States than there are departments of German and soil science, because (among other reasons) there are many more scholars in the former disciplines than the latter, from which the best departments presumably cull the best. Her method can produce a rank order of departments, but it is useless in determining how many anthropology departments can be considered "distinguished," how many are "inadequate to confer the Ph.D.," and so on.

2. She assumes that hiring practices are entirely meritocratic; she ignores such factors as geographical propinquity, "old school tie," "old boy" networks, affirmative action programs and other factors that undoubtedly influence hiring decisions.

3. In considering only those who actually earned their Ph.D.'s and entered the labor market, she ignores the education received by a department's terminal M.A.'s, Ph.D. drop-outs, and graduates who entered non-academic jobs or are still unemployed. For example, using exchange theory, a department that produced 30 Ph.D.'s in recent years, 10 of whom are employed by first-rate universities, 10 of whom, unable to find academic employment, are working as museum assistant curators and industrial anthropolggists and 10 of whom are unemployed, would have a much better exchange rating than a department that produced 30 anthropologists, 2 of whom are employed by first-rate universi-

ties and 28 of whom are employed by good liberal arts colleges.

4. Another weakness of exchange theory for departmental rankings is that in focussing entirely on where a department's graduates are placed it relies very heavily on the excellence of a department's students, to the virtual exclusion of a department's other qualities, and it is well-established that by far the most important factor in determining student "output" is student "input."(16). Thus, during the 1960s, the Harvard and Yale English departments were invariably ranked as the two best English departments in the country, yet Harvard always accepted (and later conferred doctorates to) about four times as many students as did Yale. Thus Yale English Ph.D.'s were probably "better," than those of Harvard, and probably got, on the average, better first jobs, but to rate Yale first according to exchange theory is to reward it very highly for its rigorous admissions standards and to largely ignore the quality of its faculty, their teaching skill, the Yale library's holdings in English literature, and so on.

Enough has been said to show that both Gourman's highly idiosyncratic method and Hurlbert's application of exchange theory to hiring decisions have very severe shortcomings, but at least each method is unique -- it has only been used in a single study. By far the most common method used in rating academic departments is to survey a number of "experts" in each discipline and ask them to rate the best schools. We will trace this method very briefly from its inception to the present, citing the most important studies of graduate school departments it has been used in.

The Methodology of Ratings by Experts

1. In 1924, as has been mentioned, Raymond Hughes listed twenty fields of graduate study (most were "arts and sciences" fields; a few, like education and "medical sciences," were professional fields) and asked 40 - 60 college and university professors in each field to name the top five departments. In his report (11) on his findings Hughes simply listed, for each of the 20 disciplines, all those schools named once or more as one of the five best, in order of how often each had been named.

2. In 1934 Hughes published the results of an expanded version of his earlier survey (5). He included 35 fields, instead of 20, and asked 100 well-known scholars in each field, as opposed to the original 40 - 60, to list all those that were adequate for doctoral work and to "star" approximately the top 20% of this group. His new report listed all departments named by more than half the scholars in each field who replied, and starred all those that were starred by half or more of the respondents.

3. The next study, like the first two, was prepared by a university administrator. Hayward Keniston, the Dean of the Graduate SChool of the University of Pennsylvania, selected what he regarded as the 25 leading universities in the country and wrote to the chairmen of 24 departments at each of those schools, asking them to name the top five, second five, and, if possible, third five departments in their field. The shortcomings of Keniston's 1957 report (8) are enormous:

a. EAch ranking is based on the opinions of only 25 people, and these people are hardly representative of all knowledgeable people in the discipline but are all department chairmen, meaning that most of them are at least middle-aged, many years away from their own graduate school training, and somewhat removed from active research themselves.

b. Only comprehensive universities with graduate programs in almost all Keniston's 24 fields are surveyed. Caltech and MIT, for example, as technical universities, are not surveyed, with the result that the list of leading departments in chemistry and physics fails to include either school.

c. Finally, by limiting his survey to a comparative ranking of 25 major research universities, Keniston prevented outstanding departments in universities that were not among his top 25 institutions from being rated.

4. Alan Cartter's famous 1964 study, An Assessment of Quality in Graduate Education (1) was designed to improve the most glaring weaknesses in Keniston's study. His survey covered 30 disciplines, compared to Keniston's 24; he questioned more than 100 experts in each discipline, compared to Keniston's 25; he surveyed three distinct groups of respondents -- department chairmen, distinguished senior scholars, and "knowledgeable junior scholars who had completed their formal training not more than ten years earlier..." (p. 12) as compared to Keniston's chairmen; he asked the experts to rate 106 institutions, (or as many of them as had a department in a particular discipline), not

just the top 25; finally, instead of asking chairmen to rate simply "the strongest department" in each field, as did Keniston (p. 115), he asked them to provide two ratings for each department -- for "quality of graduate faculty" and "effectiveness of graduate program."

5. Cartter's study was certainly the most well-designed study up to its time, and the 1969 study by Roose and Andersen for the American Council on Education (12) is, in its authors' words, "essentially a replication of Cartter's work" (p. 1). The authors do, though, add seven disciplines and 25 institutions to those surveyed by Cartter, they provide ratings for more departments (the top 50 or 60 in each major discipline), compared to Cartter's 20 or 35), and they provide, for each discipline, a chart showing how many raters consider the top schools "better than," "worse than" and "little change" from the way they were five years earlier. Though studies of individual disciplines have been published subsequent to the Roose-Andersen study, like Hurlbert's anthropology study, there have been no studies of large numbers of disciplines, and the Roose-Andersen study remains the standard of excellence in the field of graduate department ratings.

TWO SPECIOUS CRITICISMS OF THE CARTTER AND ROOSE-ANDERSEN STUDIES

As a standard of excellence, it is anything but excellent, for reasons which we shall soon discuss. Before showing the inadequacy of the Roose-Andersen survey, and of all the other surveys, in rating graduate departments, we will examine two often-made criticisms of the Roose-Andersen and Cartter studies which do not

appear to be justified.

The first is that any department's ratings may be biased because of the so-called "halo" effect, so that individual departments at, say, Harvard, benefit from that school's outstanding overall reputation, while strong departments at a poor school are rated lower than they should be because of the school's overall mediocrity. This argument is made in a recent front-page article in the Chronicle of Higher Education (7). It is difficult to prove that the "halo effect" does not matter at all, but it would appear that it does not matter very much. For a careful look at the individual departmental ratings in the Roose-Andersen study reveals may individual departments that are rated far higher than their universities as a whole. Among these are the art history department at New York University (rated first in the country in quality of graduate faculty), the German department at Indiana (3rd), linguistics at UCLA (2nd), philosophy at Pittsburgh (4th), anthropology at the U. of Arizona (12th), geography at Syracuse (8th), entomology at UC Riverside (4th), population biology at U. of Georgia (tied for 3rd) and chemical engineering at the U. of Delaware (10th). Similarly, some individual departments at outstanding universities are rated far lower than the institution as a whole: these would include civil engineering at Harvard (18th, behind Purdue, Texas and Minnesota); chemical engineering at Yale; rated below U. of Houston, U. of Tennessee and Louisiana State; anthropology at Princeton, rated below Hawaii, Southern Illinois

and the U. of New Mexico, and botany at Rockefeller University, rated below Iowa State, U. of Massachusetts and Washington University in St. Louis. So any influence the halo effect may have is clearly far from overwhelming.

Another criticism, made by Hughes himself in his 1934 report, is that there is a time lag of several years [redacted] before a department's reputation "catches up" with its present quality. He wrote (5):

> "There was marked evidence of a lag in the estimate of departments. A department which has been strong, but which has lost good men and is really on the decline, has in several cases been rated too high. On the other hand, several departments that have recently developed much strength seem to be under-rated.
>
> (p. 194).

This criticism may very well have been valid in 1934. But in 1977, in the era of jet planes, far more and far better-attended regional and national meetings of disciplines than previously, more faculty publication, wider and quicker dissemination of faculty publication, in addition to readily accessible publications wholly devoted to higher education, like Change and the Chronicle of Higher Education, any time lag that exists should probably be measured in months, not years. Indeed, examining the Roose-Andersen tables listing opinions on [redacted] whether a particular department has improved or declined in the last five years, we find, in many cases, an impressive unanimity or near-unanimity. This can be illustrated by looking at the ratings for two of

New York state's best-known universities, SUNY at Buffalo and Columbia. SUNY at Buffalo, which in the mid-1960's hired Berkeley's former Chancellor as President, set out to make itself "the Berkeley of the East," and enjoyed vast infusions of state money for several years, has many departments that are almost universally perceived as having improved. In 1969, 66 raters (out of 71) considered its classics department "better than five years ago"; in English, the figures were 58 out of 61; in history, 41 of 49; in psychology, 46 of 53; in zoology, 21 of 26; in chemistry, 51 of 57. Columbia, on the other hand, was perceived by raters as having declined precipitously in relative standing in almost every department between 1964 and 1969. In those years, its rating in classics dropped from 6th to 12th; in German, from 9th to 16th; in music, from 3rd to 9th; in political science, from 5th to 11th; in psychology, from 14th to 27th; in biochemistry, from 11th to 26th; in physiology, from 10th to 27th; in zoology, from 14th to 28th.

It is scarcely likely that Columbia's decline in ratings over five years is due to rater bias or other faults in the survey's design, since each of its departments was judged by an entirely different group of raters, but of its 25 departments which were rated in both 1964 and 1969, it received an improved rating in one (astronomy), an identical rating in three, and a lower rating for fully 21. The fact that 25 entirely separate groups of raters perceive many departments in one university

as having improved vastly in five years and almost all the departments of another university declining sharply in the same period would seem to show that there is not a great time lag before departmental changes become known by knowledgeable scholars in the discipline.

VALID CRITICISMS OF THE CARTTER AND ROOSE-ANDERSEN STUDIES

Although criticisms of the Cartter and Roose-Andersen ratings on the grounds of "halo effect" and "time lag" are not, therefore, warranted, there are several criticisms of these studies that need to be made. Though up to now we have discussed the ratings of graduate departments of arts and science, not of professional schools, since the former ratings are more numerous and methodologically better, from now on we will often refer, in illustrating an argument, to UCLA's Graduate School of Education, especially its higher education specialization.

A fundamental flaw in Roose and Andersen's division of ratings into two groups -- for "faculty quality" and "effectiveness of doctoral program" -- is that though they purport two rate two different things, they actually measure the same thing. For each of their 30 disciplines, the correlation between these two scores is .98 or higher -- in eighteen of them, it is .99. Though it is reasonable to expect a substantial correlation in any department between the quality of its graduate faculty and its overall graduate program, correlations which are invariably .98 or higher strongly imply that the same quality is being measured. It is reasonable to conclude that what is being

measured in both instances is the quality of the faculty, since faculty accomplishments are much more visible to off-campus judges than such things as library resources, quality of students, faculty interest in classroom teaching, teaching ability and accessibility to students, and other factors which comprise the effectiveness of a doctoral program. But there are a great many other factors that should be included in any worthwhile rating. Here are some:

1. The presence of scholars elsewhere in the university who can enrich the graduate careers of the department's students. At Harvard, for example, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, students in its Graduate School of Education with an interest in higher education had access to David Riesman, Talcott Parsons, and Seymour Martin Lipset, all outstanding sociologists with a long-standing interest in higher education. At Columbia in the same era, Teachers College students interested in higher education had access to historians Richard Hofstadter, Walter Metzger and Jacques Barzun, all of them distinguished historians at Columbia with a keen interest in the field. At the U. of Wisconsin, education students have access to scholars in the sociology department with an interest in education, especially the economics of education. At UCLA, on the other hand, there are few if any professors in the sociology or psychology department with a professional interest in the field of higher education, and only one (Dr. Stanley Coben) in the history department. All

other things being equal, a student of higher education would have had richer opportunities at Harvard or Columbia a decade ago, because of the presence of outstanding scholars in the field elsewhere in the university, than at UCLA today.

2. The number and percentage of students in the program who are full-time students, or who are part-time students with on-campus jobs as teaching assistants, research assistants, and so on. In the UCLA higher education program there are virtually no full-time students, and few who spend much time on campus. Most students have jobs, often full-time jobs, many miles from campus; they are on campus only a few hours a week. A higher education specialization where almost all students spend a lot of time on campus would probably be one with a richer learning environment, though this environment would not be reflected in any "quality of faculty" ratings.

3. Student living arrangements. At Columbia there is a large dormitory for education students on the same street as Teachers College and four blocks from Columbia's main quadrangle. AT UCLA's higher education division not one single student lives on campus, the median distance from home to school is, I would estimate, about 20 miles, and many in-residence students live more than 100 miles away, for example in San Diego (three students), Bakersfield (two) and Sacramento (one). It seems plausible that, all other things being equal, students can exchange ideas with the faculty and each other more easily if they live on or near campus than dozens of miles away, but this factor is not considered by the existing ratings.

4, Accessibility to professors. At UCLA, of the four full professors in the higher education specialization, three spend almost all their working hours off-campus in one of two research institutes. A student very seldom rubs shoulders with them in the corridors or offices of Moore Hall. (This year, as it happens, one of the three full professors who normally is seldom on campus was chairperson of the specialization and spent much time on campus; but the fourth, the only one whose normal routine calls for him to be on campus much, was on sabbatical leave during the spring quarter and so largely inaccessible to students). This arrangement might seem to offer less advantageous learning conditions than if the senior professors were more accessible to students. On the other hand, both of these research institutes employ a number of student research assistants, and students who work there have more access to these professors than they ever would merely by "brushing shoulders" with them in Moore Hall; they get to work with them as junior colleagues, and they have the opportunity to do research, to publish, and to get publication credit while they are still in graduate school. So the fact that three of the four senior professors in higher education spend much of their time in off-campus research institutes causes a bi-modal distribution of access to them, in which a few students see them often and intimately, in academically enriching ways, and most students see less of them than they otherwise would. It is not clear whether on balance students in the department as a whole are benefited or hurt by this situation, but obviously this arrangement is an important part of the ambience of UCLA's

higher education specialization, and one that is entirely outside the scope of the existing ratings.

5. Another important component in the excellence of a graduate department is the quality of its students. A department whose students have GRE's of 1350 should be, all other things being equal, a livelier, more exciting place, and one in which students are apt to learn more from each other, than a department whose GRE scores are 1000. Present ratings, except for Hurlbert's exchange theory system, do not consider student quality as a factor in a department's excellence.

6. Still another factor is the interest and motivation of different student in the subject they are studying. In UCLA's higher education specialization there are many students, who are often among the brightest students in the program, who teach liberal arts disciplines in two or four-year colleges and need a Ph.D. for career advancement. Such students -- to put it mildly -- do not often have excessive zeal for higher education as a field of study, for a number of reasons.

First, they do not have to excel in the program to maximize their chances of getting a job when they graduate; they already have a job. Second, their real academic interests -- such as they are -- often lie in the field they teach and not in higher education, with higher education serving merely as the quickest route to a Ph.D. Third, to become really interested in higher education as a field and to devote much time and effort to it would be defeating their own purpose, which is to get a degree as

quickly and painlessly as possible; if they had wanted an arduous course of study they could have enrolled in a Ph.D. program in the discipline they teach. Fourth, since they have full-time jobs they have little time and energy, in any circumstances, to put into their work in higher education. In short, such students, whatever their intelligence, are not always as interested in or as knowlegeable about higher education as students who chose to study higher education as a discipline and who intend to make a career of it. Yet no present ratings take into consideration the percentage of a department's full-time, highly motivated students.

7. Finally, the ambience of the capus as a whole and of the surrounding environs is an important aspect of one's education in any program at any university. At UCLA, the campus is graced with a student newspaper that has given much more space, over the last three quarters, to Gene Bartow than to Allan Bakke, and which prints in anesthetizing detail the results of every single match of the men's and woman's badminton team while it fails to print one word when the UCLA faculty won more Guggenheim fellowships this year than any faculty in the country except Berkeley's.

It has a student body which thousands will drive 20 miles and walk through a dangerous neighborhood to attend a football game that can be seen on television, but which no more than 50 will attend a well-publicized on-campus series of lectures by the pre-eminent British literary scholar, Christopher Ricks, and out of which more than 1900 will attend a performance by Johnny Carson, who

can be seen on television several nights a week; but no more than 20 will attend a lecture, given the day after Carson's appearance, by the president of the University.

So far as the ambience of the surrounding area is concerned, students in any discipline at Harvard and Berkeley can walk 100 feet off campus and be surrounded by shops selling both new and used books and by motion picture theatres showing serious films. Students at UCLA have the plastic paradise of Westwood, with its innumerable fast food and cheap jean franchises, and where the movie theatres screen not "Potemkin" but "Slap Shot." The general campus and neighborhood ambience is, of course, not the responsibility of any academic department -- a department could do very little about the general campus ambience, and virtually nothing about the off-campus ambience, even if it wished to -- but it <u>is</u> part of the total learning environment of any student in any university department, and in an ideal rating system it would be included.

<u>What Is To Be Done?</u>

A better way to evaluate and rank academic departments than any that has been tried would be to create a rating system that is at the same time more objective <u>and</u> more subjective than any that exists now. Those qualities of a campus that are susceptible to being rated objectively should be. These would include not only faculty degrees, honors, and publications, which are now

informally considered by most of the existing ratings, but also such factors as the quality of the students (as evidenced by their schools of undergraduate study, undergraduate GPA's and SAT scores), the proportion of students who are full-time, the number of hours, both in and outside the classroom, that faculty spend with students, the types of jobs students get when they graduate, the university's library resources in a given field and the accessibility of those resources, and so on.

This objective information would be augmented by consideration of the existential aspects of departmental and campus life, those qualities that are nearly impossible to measure precisely but which unquestinnably dom greatly influence the learning atmosphere of any department. Such qualities would include the number and quality of student interactions with each other and with faculty, how much students read, thought and wrote (for example, in the campus newspaper or literary magazine) about their field of study, what kind of resources relevant to a department were available elsewhere on campus, how lively, stimulating, and "intellectually exciting," to use that cliché, the departmental ambience seemed to be.

These existential qualities would, it goes without saying, be extremely difficult to measure with any degree of preciseness. Those departments that were rated low based on, say, the number of books and articles their faculty had published in recent

years would take their defeat bitterly but more or less silently, feeling that there was some underlying rational reason for using publication as a criterion, however unfairly it may have been applied in the case of their particular department. But departments marked low in intangible qualities like "intellectual excitement" would howl with rage.

There would be great difficulty in deciding how much to weigh the objectively measured qualitées -- size of library holdings, for example, and GRE scores of students -- relative to each other and relative to the subjective measures. Though such a study would offer numerous challenges to the wit, ingenuity and determination of the investigator, it would, I believe, provide a fairer, more comprehensive and accurate evaluation of academic departments than any study yet has. This author is no Nostradamus, or even Jeanne Dixon, but he predicts that such a study will be published before 1990. Look for it in the card catalog under "W."

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